



Green tibet

Annual Newsletter 2008
Environment & Development Desk



Middle Rongbuk Glacier in Tibet in 1968 (above) and in 2007 (bottom)

Source: John Novis, Greenpeace

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Our Desk

Central Tibetan Administration established the Environment Desk in March 1990, which later evolved into the present Environment and Development Desk (EDD). EDD operates under the Department of Information and International Relations (DIIR), Central Tibetan Administration in Dharamsala. The primary goal of our desk is to monitor Chinese policies and practices related to environment & development issues in the Tibetan Plateau. EDD works closely with various governmental and non-governmental organizations, media, experts and advocates on environment from all over the world to exert international pressure on China to halt environmental destruction in Tibet. We conduct research and publish our work in order to encourage global awareness on environment and development in Tibet and campaign against environmental degradation in Tibet as a result of China's developmental policies. Our desk also imparts environmental education trainings, workshops and seminars for Tibetans in exile.

EDD's activities are mainly focused on Tibet. Our chief goals are:

- **To monitor and research on environment and development issues in Tibet.**
- **To disseminate information and carry out selective advocacy on promoting sustainable development in Tibet.**
- **To create awareness and educate public on Tibet's environmental issues in the world in general and the exiled Tibetan community in particular**

EDD Updates

Environment and Development Desk (EDD) has been involved in research on climate change in Tibet throughout this year. We are fortunate enough to work on this important topic with help from volunteering experts and photographers.

EDD extends its warmest gratitude to the following people for their contributions to our work.

Gabriel Lafitte,
John Isom,
John Novis

Our special thanks goes to Nigel Hungerford for his donation to purchase a new computer for our desk.

EDD thanks Tsultrim Palden Dekhang, an EDD former head for donating books and Darren Noy for providing us with useful information on environment.

EDD remains grateful to Tenpa Chonjor, Kunchok Dolma, Freeman Blalock, Osara, Moritz, Choedup, Bomi Lee and Tenzin Jamyang for their voluntary work during this fiscal year.

Ms. Dolma Yangzom left our office to reunite with her family in the United States. Her contribution to EDD is highly appreciated. We wish her all the best.

Tenzin Norbu will join the EDD from December 15, 2008. He has been appointed as a deputy secretary and will head the desk. He has a master's degree in Science (MSc in 'Environmental Technology and Management') from the Asian Institute of Technology, Thailand, in the year 2002.

Advisory Board

Kalon Kelsang Yangkyi Takla, DIIR
Thubten Samphel, Secretary, DIIR
Sonam Norbu Dagpo, Secretary, DIIR

Editors

Chokyi and Dolma Yangzom
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One of the growing concerns among environmentalists is that one mining project after another will be carried out incessantly in Tibet in the next few years.

The Yulong copper mine in Chamdo commences its operation this year. Similarly China's largest aluminum producer Chinalco launched a company in Lhasa to explore and smelt in Tibet. China will be spending an estimated 629 million Yuan on building one additional gas pipeline from Tsaidam Basin in Amdo region. In September 2008, 22 huge industrial projects including 11 mining projects were announced to implement in Tibet.

Many more mining announcements may follow. Previously, locals reported several cases of pollution which resulted in death of their livestock caused by mining. Unearthly patches are already found in Tibet and many other cases of grassland deterioration due to mining exploration are reported.

Tibet's grassland is extremely sensitive and fragile due to its high altitude. Large-scale mining will inevitably result in desertification of the grassland in Tibet. Scientists and researchers in China have been acknowledging that desertification in Tibet brings dust storms in China.

Most of the present mining in Tibet is located near the river, which runs down to several countries posing risks to downstream water users. Poisonous chemicals like mercury, cyanide and arsenic are used to extract mine. These chemicals seep down under the ground and mix with river water affecting not only people who are dependent upon these rivers for irrigation but also riparian life. Bangladesh is already facing arsenic effects in its Brahmaputra river.

Climate change is also an important issue of concern. Tibet is observing drastic fluctuations in its climate. Temperature in Tibet is increasing at a rate of 0.3 degree celsius every ten years while in China it increases at 0.4 degree celsius every hundred years.

Shortage of rainfall in 2007 in China's north and northeast left 39.93 million hectares of farmland affected by drought. China's northern region has been facing acute water shortages since its "mother river" started drying up. China's urgent need of water in its parched north results into the diversion of water from south to north.

China's observance of its moral obligation towards downstream countries seems nonexistent. According to NDTV, India now has to pay for receiving the Brahmaputra data to prepare in advance for floods. China also plans to build a series of dams in the southern Tibet. This will bring environmental disasters in the region.

Asia's future environmental stability is at stake in the hands of the Chinese government development planners. China will be the first to suffer environmental catastrophe if it does not take appropriate measures to mitigate those risks of environmental fallout due to its development policies.

China Forces Tibetans to Flout Wildlife Laws

Hindustan times, New Delhi, January 31, 2008

A string of blogs from Tibet have accused Chinese local government officials of forcing Tibetans to wear their traditional clothes trimmed with proscribed animal products like tiger skin and otter fur. The reports have sparked an outcry among wildlife experts in India.

The officials, claim some blogs, were doing this to ensure people do not follow the Dalai Lama's call to shun all traditional wear that have animal products. One said the officials have threatened to shoot at people who do not wear the traditional dress or even have their salary deducted.

A source in India claimed that Chinese local banks were also offering loans to buy the traditional dresses. They are expensive because they contain banned animal products. The blogs, now blocked, carried pictures of official celebrations in Tibetan provinces with group dancers in the traditional dress chubba, trimmed with fur and tiger skin.

The Chinese embassy spokesperson in New Delhi, Li Hubin, said: "We do not have any knowledge (of such reports) and neither do we think this is possible. China respects international and national wildlife laws."

Some excerpts of the blogs are available with Hindustan times. One of them by a well-known Tibetan writer says: "Among men and women performers from six counties of the Yushu prefecture, many are wearing Tibetan clothes trimmed with fur of otter, leopard and tiger."

More than a dozen police (men) conveying them looked like some body guards were conveying those performers around the playground (sic)." Information secretary of the Tibetan government in-exile Thubten Samphel said from Dharamsala: "The Chinese have particularly asked television broadcasters to wear clothes with animal skin."

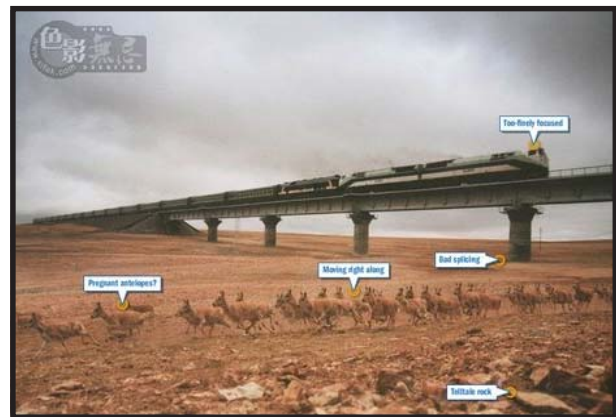
"There is pressure on locals to use wildlife attire. PETA has recent footage of fully operational farm furs in China," said Anuradha Sawhney, the national coordinator of the People for Ethical Treatment of Animals.

Ashok Gupta, the vice-chairman of the Wildlife Trust of India, said from Dubai: "This is a serious allegation and needs to be verified. If true, it is a gross violation of not just international wildlife conventions but also Chinese wildlife laws".

A Manipulated Photoshop Image of Endangered Tibetan Antelopes

Summarize from Wall Street Journal, February 22 2008

A fake prize winning photograph of Tibetan antelopes running un-dauntingly near a high-speed train puts Chinese media and journalistic photography in doubt. The photo by Liu Wei-quang shows more than 20 antelopes wandering beneath an overpass of a railway, was selected a top 10 "photos of the year" in 2006 by CCTV, china's state-run television network.



The Fake Photo of Migrating Tibetan Antelopes

By Liu Wei-quang

The picture was captioned "Qinghai-Tibet railway opens green passage for wildlife." Mr Liu mentioned during the award ceremony that he had waited in a pit for eight days for the antelopes to pass at the same time as the train.

"Some antelope lovers knew from the start that something was wrong with Mr Liu's photo," reported Wall Street Journal, citing Yang Xin of the antelope protection group Green River. Mr Xin further went on to point out that many of the antelopes in the picture appeared to be pregnant, whereas many of them would have given birth before late June when the photo was supposedly taken.

Mr. Liu admitted to have used Photoshop to blend two pictures, and resigned from the Daqing Evening Newspaper. He wrote on his blog that "I have no reason to continue my sacred career as a newsman. I am not qualified for the job." The editor of the newspaper also resigned after posting an apology on its website. Now, several concerns and doubts are raised against the Chinese media and its authenticity. A few people also believe that what Mr Liu did is a perfect propaganda tool for the

communist- government to highlight the harmonious co-existence of train with animals and humans. The deception was initially detected by a photographer who saw a copy of the photo posted on Beijing's Line 5 Subway platform. This further went on to become a more widespread online discussion, which finally helped to uncover the truth.

Tibetan Antelope is endemic to the Tibetan Plateau and are recognized as an endangered species. It is protected under the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) since 1979 and listed as Class-A protected animal in China's Wildlife Protection Law since 1989.

Conference on Himalayan Rivers and Climate Change

(Tibet.net) February 14, 2008

Dharamshala: Many scientists, educators, grassroots environmental activists from all over India and abroad, gathered to examine the approaches to preserve Himalayan rivers and to tackle climate change at India International Centre, New Delhi, on 11th February.

The conference was organized by the Navdanya Trust, the Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology, based in Dehradun, Uttarakhand, India.

Mrs Vandana Shiva, director of the Navdanya Trust, underlined that diversion of Himalayan rivers, which is the biggest concern, poses a serious environmental threat to Asia.

While responding to a question on how India could stop China from diverting the Brahmaputra river, Mr Arpi, a Tibetologist said "In the absence of trans-boundary river treaties, such actions are negligible. Besides, China is non-signatory to the UN Convention on the law of non-navigational uses of international water courses."

Referring Himalayan rivers as rivers of Tibet, Mr Arpi also said: "Universal responsibility is the only solution to this humanity crisis." The issue of Himalayan rivers is a Tibetan issue. Some of the important issues concerning Himalayan rivers are pollution, diversion, integrity of river systems.

In the report released by the World Wildlife Fund for nature in March 2007, it was mentioned that four of the world's ten most endangered rivers originate in Tibet. Other topics, including scientific evidence for glacial retreat and erosion rates over the Ganges and Brahmaputra drainages were also discussed.

The speakers from Ladakh and Bundelkhand shared their own experiences of how their lives are being affected by climate change. Ms Chokyi and Ms Dolma Yangzom of EDD at the DIIR attended the conference.

Tibetan Community Honoured with the Venu Menon National Animal Award

(Tibet.net) February 20, 2008

Dharamshala: Tibetan Community was awarded the 10th Venu Menon National Animal Award for coming out strongly against wildlife crime and its pro-wildlife approach, at a ceremony held yesterday in New Delhi.

The Venu Menon National Animal Awards have commemorated excellence in animal welfare since 1999.



Kalon Tenpa Tsering receiving the award

Other recipients of the award included six individuals and two organizations for making a difference to the lives of animals through the acts of kindness and extraordinary courage.

Kalon Tenpa Tsering, a representative of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, based in New Delhi, accepted the award on behalf of our community.

In the wake of His Holiness the Dalai Lama's appeal, Tibetan people across the globe, especially in Tibet have shunned the practice of using wild animal skins such as tiger, leopard or otter to trim their clothes.

Such initiatives from the people in Tibet have received huge appreciation and acknowledgements from international wildlife conservation organizations.

Today there are only few Tibetans in Tibet most of whom are government cadres still using animal skins. They are in fact being forced by the Chinese authorities to do so in order to keep their jobs. Chinese tourists are the main consumers of animal skins in Tibet.

Global Convention Underscores the Impact of Climate Change in Tibet

(Tibet.net) June 2, 2008

Palampur: The impact of climate change in Tibet and its global consequences were highlighted at a three-day “Global Convention on Climate Change” held in Palampur, Himachal Pradesh, from 30 May to 1 June 2008.

The convention was jointly organized by the World Council for Corporate Governance, the World Environment Foundation and the Institute of Directors. It was inaugurated by Professor Prem Kumar Dhumal, chief minister of Himachal Pradesh.

The conference aims to implement holistic approaches for combating climate change, and to share experiences of leading companies in adopting low carbon, low waste and low energy technologies.

The meeting offered opportunities for professionals, academics, policy makers and civil society advocates from across India and abroad, to mutually share their experiences and contribute collective wisdom to mitigate the impact of climate change.

Ms Chokyi and Ms Dolma Yangzom at Environment and Development Desk (EDD), the Department of Information and International Relations (DIIR) of the Central Tibetan Administration attended the convention.

Speaking of the impact of climate change in Tibet at the conference, a researcher at EDD, Chokyi, had drawn attention of participants to the consequences of climate change on the livelihood of millions of people in Tibet and neighboring countries.

The Tibetan Plateau has witnessed a sudden rise in temperature since the early 1970s. This has led to many abnormal phenomena such as receding glaciers, shrinkages of lakes, and dessciated permafrost and many rivers. Altogether, these are a primary source of Asia’s water systems. Abnormal climate change has increased the frequency of landslides, causing disasters in the region. Glacial lake outbursts and floods have also increased in recent years. The impact of climate change in Tibet could be particularly devastating for the livelihood of downstream that heavily rely on Tibetan water.

DIIR Observes World Environment Day

(Tibet.net) June 5, 2008

Dharamshala: The Environment and Development Desk of the Department of Information and International Relations (DIIR), today held an environmental awareness workshop to Tibetan students from four different schools, to mark the World Environment Day, at the Gangkyi staff mess hall. The World Environment Day, commemorated each year on 5 June, is one of the principal vehicles through which the United Nations stimulates worldwide awareness of the environmental issues and enhances political attentions and actions.

Twenty-two participants from Tibetan schools, including Tibetan Children’s Village (TCV) Dharamshala, TCV Gopalpur, and Central Schools for Tibetans, Chauntra and Herbertpur, attended the workshop.

In his opening address, Mr Sonam N Dago, secretary for International Relations said: “Rapid building of factories and industries, and large scale deforestation aimed solely for making materialistic developments, pose a serious threat to the world environment. Natural disasters, such as cyclone, drought, storm, etc are some of the detrimental consequences of environmental degradation.”

“Unusual hot weather conditions nowadays in Dharamshala, recent earthquake in China and storms in the US are some of the pressing implications of environmental degradation in the world,” he added. He said tampering with the natural ecosystem of one area would cause the domino effect on its surroundings. Large scale dam constructions in Tibetan rivers and exploitation of natural resources in Tibet would have serious environmental impacts in China and other Asian countries, which source their water from Tibet.

Mr Dago said the environmental condition of an area of an individual or at a community level have immediate effects on its neighbourhood or a country. Emphasising the need to maintain clean environment at these two levels, he said efforts should be made in shunning the use of hazardous non-biodegradable materials such as plastic bags.

Expressing concerns over the global warming, he said that the international communities should mobilize efforts to cut carbon emissions, which trigger rapid melting of glaciers that would cause floods and other natural calamities.

He said the younger generation should bear the responsibility not to repeat the wrong precedents set inadvertently or otherwise by their elders.





Students demonstrating their creative writing on environment

Guest Speaker Tashi Tsering, an expert on rivers of Tibet, provided a detailed presentation on pressing environmental issues concerning exploitative measures being undertaken by the Chinese government in Tibet.

Ms. Chokyi and Dolma Yangzom, researchers at the Environment and Development offered basic environmental education and spoke on the crucial environmental issues in Tibet.

Forced Nomadic Resettlement Continues in Tibet

(People's Daily Online) August 15, 2008

Despite several criticisms from environmentalists and human rights groups, China continues its official nomadic resettlement policy. According to the official Chinese online news, People's Daily dated August 15, 2008, under a government led program, more than 73,700 nomadic Tibetans from Kanlho "Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture (TAP)" of southern Gansu Province would be relocated from their traditional homes in the headwater areas of the Yellow River to permanent houses, which are nothing more than concrete blocks in confinement for Tibetan nomads.

This figure adds on to 52,000 nomads to be resettled in 2008, according to Reuter's correspondent in Beijing, earlier this year. About 250,000 nomadic Tibetans were relocated in 2006-2007 alone.

The government already spent 1.3 billion Yuan for this resettlement program, Xinhua said, citing Wang Hongwei, head of the headquarters for the resettlement program.

This controversial resettlement program by the Chinese government started in 2006. As a result, several thousand nomadic lives have been affected. Many of them are forced to leave their ancestral homes for big development projects such as constructions of dams and roads, according to the Human Rights Watch.

Several reports by individuals and organizations suggest that such resettlement program lacks genuine and active participation of the nomadic Tibetans whose lives are directly changed by such short-sighted government policies.

On August 15, 2008, the official Chinese online news People's Daily reported, "A growing population and excessive grazing led to the desertification of large areas of pasture in the past 30 years and a 25% reduction of the river water." Although it is true that there are serious environmental problems, the official measures with which these problems are tackled remain questionable. These nomads and human rights activists suspect that the Tibetans are being made scapegoats for the cost of big industrial and developmental projects.

Besides environmental implications, resettlement of nomads often involves slaughtering of herds and adapting to a new lifestyle that they are least familiar with. Although the Chinese government claims that they are offering loans for the nomads to restart their life, nomadic Tibetans generally lack much needed skills, vocational trainings and education and monetary capital to start new businesses. As a result, they are marginalized and fail to find any alternative mean of livelihood. This further push them towards impoverishment.

Government's official housing and resettlement project will have relocated about 80% of Tibetan nomads by 2010, according to People's Daily.

This planet is our only home. We have no alternative refuge. Therefore, everyone has the responsibility to care not only for our fellow human beings but also for insects, plants, animals and this very planet.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama

Rampant Mining in Tibet

Shethongmon (Ch: Xiethongmon) mine gets approval from the Chinese government

Continental Minerals Corporation, based in Vancouver, Canada, received two more approvals from the state government for its mining license application for the Shethongmon Project in an area roughly 250 km west of Lhasa, "TAR." According to the company's website, the State Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) approved the Environmental Impact Assessment and the Ministry of Water Resources approved their Soil and Water Conservation Plan.

"With this, the company has received approvals for all but one of the reports required for the mining license application," the company's website noted on Jan 9, 2008. On August 18, 2008, the company announced that it has received another approval for the Land Reclamation Report for its project in Shethongmon, thereby completing all the necessary license application formalities. Shethongmon was discovered in 2005 with high grade copper and gold deposits.

"Finalization of the Land Reclamation Report moves Continental one step closer to achieving the legal authorization and social license required to successfully develop the project," cited its website. The Land Reclamation Report commits to return the affected land for a productive public use after the mining operation. The company promised to develop projects that bring meaningful benefits to the Tibetan people, while protecting its fragile ecology. We hope that the company stands up to its commitment.

The Chinese government should be respectful in handling Tibetan environment and its cultural sensitivities. Villages such as Tsurgung and Drongkar are deeply affected by the mining project. A more direct grassroots involvement of the local Tibetan population in decision making and a development model that provides direct and measurable benefits to the Tibetans ahead of economic migrants are essential.

Yulong Copper Mine in Tibet is Operating Now EDD, Thursday, 21 August 2008 (Tibet.net)

People's Daily Online, 15 August 2008, reported that Yulong Copper Mine in Tibet will start operating from September this year. Environment and Development Desk (EDD) of the Central Tibetan Administration is deeply concerned about the environmental and social implications of the project on the Tibetan plateau and its people.

Yulong Copper Mine in Jomda (Ch: Jiangda) County, Chamdo (Ch: Qamdo) Prefecture, "TAR", is one of the largest mines of its kind in the world with an area of 1,870 sq km. The mine is notably the second largest mine in Asia with a proven deposit of 6.5 million tonnes of copper in ore form and another 10 million tonnes of prospective reserves. It is expected to produce 2,000 tonnes of refined copper in 2008 and the company hopes to expand the production capacity to 100,000 tons a year eventually according to People's Daily Online. Yulong copper mine is predominantly owned by Zijin Mining Group and Western Mining, both of which are China's major mining and development companies.

The operation of the mine had been delayed since the 1990s due to the remoteness of the area and its weak supporting infrastructures for the mining industry. However, Yang Qianrang, an industrial planning official with the regional economic commission, said that the Tibet Yulong Copper Co. Ltd. finished building the basic infrastructure, as well as recruiting staffs and training, building roads and housings for the miners etc. A power station was built on the Mekong River (Tib: Zachu) in Dragyab (Ch: Chaya) county of Chamdo Prefecture, to generate electricity to extract Yulong copper deposit.

The scale of mining in Tibet has increased primarily with China's rapid industrialization and urbanization programs. Yulong copper mine will reduce China's dependence on imports of copper from other countries. The unprecedented extraction of mineral resources in Tibet over the years has immensely benefited the Chinese. With several new mining projects underway such as this, severe environmental consequences for the region is bound to occur, especially on its water resources which flow down to several other countries.

Although, it is true that the development of mineral resources is inevitable for the overall development of Tibet's economy, but it is all the more imperative to save the fragile ecology of the Tibetan plateau and meet the needs of the Tibetan people in a sustainable way. EDD makes the following recommendations to all concerned individuals, organizations and corporations:

1. To ensure safety and prevent environmental damage, an Environmental Impact Assessment should be conducted and be made available for public viewing.
2. Environmental NGOs in China, including State Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) should strictly supervise and monitor all the mining activities to mitigate environmental damage.
3. Tibetans should be regarded as a key stakeholder. Benefits from the mining should go to the Tibetans through jobs, social welfare schemes, social securities etc.
4. We urge all corporations working with and for the Yulong Copper Mine to follow the guidelines for sustainable development projects, proposed by the Central Tibetan Administration.

I appeal to all foreign mining companies and their shareholders thinking about working in Tibet to consider carefully about the ethical values when embarking on such a venture.

H.H. the Dalai Lama

Chinese Aluminium giant Chinalco to mine and smelt in Tibet

Aluminium Corporation of China (ACH), Chinalco has announced its plans to invest USD 36.5 million (250 million Yuan) for its newly established unit called China Aluminium Tibet Mining Corporation Ltd. The unit was formally launched in Lhasa, the capital city of Tibet, on September 4, 2008, and would be involved in exploration, mining and smelting, reported the company's website.

The company is reported to have caused serious environmental problems in Amdo, in the eastern part of Tibet, where they have been operating before. Environmental activists criticized the company for harming local livestock, herds and water supplies in the region as a result of the waste generated from the smelting plant. Furthermore, due to the short-term and highly destructive mining methods used, miners leave the grassland devastated and render future mining unprofitable. Hence serious concerns are being raised about the environmental and social implications of a similar plant in Lhasa.

Tibet has a vast reserve of rich and unexplored mineral resources. Tibet has deposits of about 126 different minerals accounting for a significant share of the entire world's reserves of gold, chromite, copper, borax and iron, cites Environment and Development Desk on its website. The launch of this corporation comes amidst stepping up of efforts to explore and exploit much of the untapped natural resources of Tibet that has sustained for several thousand years.

Since the operation of Gormo-Lhasa Railway in July 2006, commercial feasibility of mining exploration has greatly improved by providing an easier, cheaper and safer access to the mining sites.

While China claims that this project will help boost the economy of Tibet, Tibetans believe that the benefits of the project largely go to the large number of Chinese immigrant laborers while destroying the fragile ecology of the plateau and will threaten the traditional culture of its people.

Like many other enterprises in China, Chinalco is also a state-owned company founded in 2001, with total assets of 377.7 billion Yuan, reported AFP.

Tibet Railway Network to be extended Further

The Associated Press dated August 19, 2008, reported that China is planning to build six new railway lines to the Tibet-Railway network by 2020, citing the Railway Ministry's spokesperson Mr Wang Yongping. Two of the new lines would connect Lhasa to Shigatse (Ch: Xigaze) and Nyingtri (Ch:Nyinchi) in the so-called Tibet Autonomous Region.

Three that connect Gormo to other areas include one to **Dunhuang** in Gansu Province, to **Kuerla** of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region and to Chengdu in Sichuan Province. The sixth would connect Siling, (Ch: Xining) the capital city of Amdo to **Zhangye** in Gansu Province. The state news agency Xinhua reported that the construction of these railway lines will begin by 2010, but there are no official confirmed reports of detailed plans and costs of construction.

The extension of these railway lines that would provide more direct and easy access for the Chinese to Tibet, especially into Chinese provinces of Gansu raises concerns about the strategic significance of these lines.

While, Chinese ministry of Railways claim that these extensions are aimed to integrate Tibet and bring the Tibetan plateau closer to the economy and culture of China, exiled Tibetans and human rights activists fear that it will further exploit Tibet's rich natural resources and will threaten the traditional culture of the Tibetan people.

Huge Industrial Investment in Tibet Underway

Chinese official news Agency, People's Daily Online announced on September 5, 2008 that the government is planning to invest heavily in the southwestern parts of the so-called Tibet Autonomous Region.

The report cited that the government will pool 21.17 billion Yuan for 22 industrial projects in the region, which includes 10 mining projects, 4 construction and building material enterprises, 3 medicine and food plants and 5 industrial development zones. The projects are expected to take five years and would be operational by 2013.

According to the report, the projects are intended to boost the economic development of the region, since the industrial development in Tibet remained inactive for a long time. These projects (once completed) are expected to make a profit of 5.11 billion Yuan and will provide 15,600 people with job opportunities.

The fact that Tibetan people generally do not possess the required skill, vocational training and education to participate and gain benefits from such projects leave them with a very faint hope of getting any kind of benefit whatsoever. Rather, it is feared that the projects would further add the marginalization of Tibetan people amidst the overcrowded Chinese immigrant laborers, officials and business people.



Current and proposed railway track in Tibet and Xinjiang
Source: Wang

China plans to build a series of dams in Tibet

To supply the region with electricity, China is building more than 750 hydroelectric power stations across Tibet.

On Oct 4, 2008, the Telegraph reports that China is building dams on Tibet's rivers and lakes despite that these projects will effect the local environment and its neighboring countries.

Many of Asian rivers originate from Tibet and these rivers are the lifelines to almost half of the world's populations in downstream areas.

The Telegraph further reports that Beijing has spent 2.9 billion RMB (£244 million) in building hydroelectric power stations over the last eight years.

Tibetans have raised their voice against such projects as the hydroelectric power plant on Yamdrok Yumtso lake. The lake is considered to be sacred in Tibet. More than 1,500 members of the People's Liberation Army are stationed to guard the power plant.

There is an estimated 2.5 billion pounds project in the pipeline to build the Longtan hydropower station, the would-be highest concrete dam in the world and the largest underground industrial complex. Like in any other infrastructure projects, more than 80,000 Tibetans were displaced in order to build the plant on the upper reaches of the Hongshui River.

According to Dai Bo, a general manager of the Longtan hydropower station in Nanning, it will be operational before the end of the year.

A recently finished 40,000-kilowatt power station in Kongpo Gyamda (Ch: Gongbo'gyamda) County started its operation in September.

In his book "Xizang zhi shui jiu zhongguo", Li Ling proposed fourteen dams to be built to divert water from the Brahmaputra River to the Yellow River. A dam in Kongpo Gyamda is one of them.

Does this mean that China is now implementing Li Ling's proposal of diverting water from the Brahmaputra to the north?

The World's Second Highest Airport in an Ethnically Tibetan Area in Sichuan Province

The world's second highest airport in the predominantly Tibetan area of Kangding in Sichuan Province is opening in October, according to the Reuters.

The airport is second only to Chamdo (Ch: Qamdo) airport in "Tibet Autonomous Region" at 4,334 metres.

Kangding (Tib: Dartsedo) airport will receive regular flights from the Yunnan provincial capital, Kunming via Chengdu before the end of the October.

With 960 million yuan (\$140.6 million) investment, the airport will be able to handle 330,000 passengers a year and have rooms for 120-seat Boeing 737s and Airbus A319s.



Travelers get aboard a China Eastern airplane at the Kangding Airport (Photo source: China Daily)

The government has recently embarked a multi-billion dollar program to repair already existing airports and build new airports in the remote west.

There are three civil airports in the "TAR", Gonggar Airport of Lhasa, Bangda Airport of Chamdo and Nyingtri airport, the last one built in 2006.

Nyingtri airport is 120 kilometers away from the world's largest canyon on the Yarlung Tsangpo (the Brahmaputra River).

According to the Tibet Autonomous Regional Civil Aviation Administration, the airport is being built at an altitude of 4,227 meters at Gunsu Township of Gar County, Ngari Prefecture in the "TAR" where population density is only 0.2/km². The area has the Mount Kailash and the Mansarover lake, main source of Indus, Karnali, Sutlej Rivers. The airport is expected to begin operation in 2010.

A 6.8 Magnitude Earthquake Hits Shigatse

An earthquake of 6.8 on the Richter scale jolted the Drongpa (Ch: Zhongba) County in Shigatse (Ch: Xigaze) but no casualties have been reported. Some of the neighboring counties such as Gertse (Ch: Gerze) and Tsochen (Ch: Choqin) counties also felt the quake, reported Xinhua. The United States Geological Survey (USGS) has recorded the tremor, which was felt as far as Nepal and New Delhi.

China: Tibet's Airport Upgraded to Handle Night Flights, Increasing Capacity by 40 Percent

International Herald Tribune, The Associated Press
June 26, 2008

Chinese state news agency says Tibet's Lhasa airport has been upgraded to handle night flights. The official Xinhua News Agency said Thursday that Gongga Airport has been fitted with runway lighting that increases its handling capacity by 40 percent. The airport handled over 1 million passengers last year.

Fourth Civil Airport in Tibet to Begin operation in 2010

A spokesperson for the Tibet Autonomous Regional Civil Aviation Administration said to Xinhua that the fourth civil airport in Tibet is expected to begin operation in 2010. The airport will add to the list of three other civil airports in Tibet, including Lhasa, Chamdo (Ch: Qamdo) and Nyingtri (Ch: Nyinchi). The airport will be built at Gumsa Township of Gar (Ch: Ge'er) County, Ngari "TAP," at an altitude of 4,227 meters. The spokesman further added that "it is designed to handle 120,000 passengers a year by 2020, with a terminal building of 3,500 m²"

Tibetan Gazelles Die of Severe Winter

According to the Tianfu Morning Post on March 15, 2008, more than 5,500 Tibetan Gazelles died of severe snowstorm in Karze (Ch: Ganzi). Residents and animals of the region were severely affected by the extreme winter with the temperature hitting a record low of -29.2 degrees Celsius. The severe winter also lead to death of around 90,000 livestock. These gazelles had co-existed harmoniously with nomads for generations.

The Tibetan Gazelle is endemic to the Tibetan plateau and is listed in the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of endangered species.

Yushu Airport to Commence Operation from June 2009

People's Daily Online on August 27, 2008 reported that Yushu (Tib: Kyegudo) airport will commence operation from June 2009. The construction of the runway was completed on August 27. The project had an initial budget of about 73 million USD. It began its construction in May 2007.

Highway Collapse with Heavy Rainfall

The highway connecting the Nyingtri (Ch: Nyingchi) Prefecture of "TAR" to Sichuan Province collapsed as a result of "the rising water [that] eroded the roadbed resulting in the collapse of the 30m section of road and suspension of traffic," quoted the official Chinese news agency, Xinhua. The rainfall that continued for two weeks in the Nyingtri Prefecture caused a mud flow to block a river close to the highway according to Xinhua on September 2, 2008.

A Billion Ton of Magnetite Found in Tibet

People's Daily Online, August 22, 2008

According to the news released by the official website of the Ministry of Commerce in China, Jianxi Province's Geological Survey found masses of magnetite in Tibet. The ore content is as high as 50% to 60%; and the potential iron ore resources could reach more than a billion ton, which is a rare occurrence in the country.

Xu Xiangchun, an expert in this field, said that Chinese magnetite is generally small and the ore content is low. At present, a large amount of iron ore in china is mainly imported. Under these conditions, the discovery of magnetite in Tibet is highly significant.

Flood Hits Area Near Labrang Monastery; Four Reported Dead

International Campaign for Tibet, September 3rd, 2008

Recent flooding in the Tibetan area of Labrang in Sangchu (Chinese: Xiahe) county, Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Gansu Province has left at least four Tibetans dead and badly affected families in the area.

No damage to Labrang Monastery has been reported.

The flooding occurred on August 20, and included a large mudslide, according to the state-run newspaper, Gansu Daily. The paper reported that over 400 people from People's Armed Police personnel were deployed. They cleared storm drains blocked by the mudslide on the morning of August 22.

Details of the impact of the flooding have been slow to emerge due to the authorities' attempt to impose a news blackout on the Tibetan plateau since the peaceful protests against Chinese misrule swept across Tibet this spring.

The earthquake that jolted China at 2:28 pm local time on May 12 of this year left several thousand people dead and homeless. According to an official Chinese source (People's Daily), 69,170 people have died and 17,427 people have been reported missing, as of June 16, 2008. On June 12, the BBC reported that at least five million people have been left homeless as a result of this massive earthquake. The earthquake, which was one of the worst natural calamities to hit China since the 1998 Yangtze River flood that left 14 million people homeless and resulted in a net property loss of \$24 million, has received tremendous sympathy and support from all around the world. Even Prime Minister Wen Jiabao (of the People's Republic of China) has gone on to call the earthquake, the "most destructive" with the most widespread impact, since the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 (Tibetan Review, June 2008).

The earthquake that measured 8M on Richter scale had its epicenter in the Lunggu (Ch: Wenchuan) county in Ngaba Qiang Tibetan (Ch:Aba) Prefecture of the Sichuan Province. The shock waves of the earthquake were felt not just in the neighboring provinces but also as far as Beijing, Shanghai, and countries such as Thailand and Vietnam. With a population of 111,800, Lunggu lies in the Southeast part of the Ngaba Qiang Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, 146 km to the northwest of Chengdu, provincial capital of Sichuan (People's Daily). It covers an area of 3,537 sq. km and has a diverse ethnic population consisting of Han, Tibetans and Qiang. According to official Chinese reports, 15,941 people have died from this county alone, as of June 16, 2008. Although the numbers of Tibetan deaths from this region remain unknown, we have realized that it is due to the sheer topography of the Tibetan inhabited areas that it has been least affected by the tremors. It has also been known that the few Tibetans who have died as an aftermath of the quake were the ones who lived in the lowland areas of the Sichuan Province.

As per reports released by International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) based in Washington DC and TibetInfoNet based in London, some of the Tibetan inhabited areas that were hit by the quake includes Lunggu, Tashiling (Ch: Lixian), Rongdrak (Ch: Danba), Drugchu (Ch: Zhugu), Sungchu (Ch: Song Pan), Trochu (Ch: Heishui), Maowun (Ch: Maoxian), and Dartsedo (Ch: Kangding) counties, all of which are located in Sichuan Province. In the four affected areas of Dartsedo, Rongdrak, Chaksam (Ch: Luding) and Gyesur (Ch: Jiulong), a total of 68,167 rooms [not homes] have been reportedly damaged or collapsed to varying degrees. According to information received by Kham aid Foundation based in Los Angeles, of all the Tibetan regions that have been affected by the quake, Rongtrak County has been the most heavily damaged, and Nyitso and Garthar monasteries have bore some cracks. While Garthar Monastery is located to the west of the epicenter and lies at the border of Rongtrak County, Nyitso Monastery is further towards Tawu (Ch: Daofu) county. Although these areas haven't been seriously affected by the quake, they still remain highly vulnerable to future damages owing to their age-old construction. Nyitso monastery is estimated to be about 350 years old.

Due to the lack of foreign media access to these regions, very limited information has been accumulated about casualties in the above regions. However, unconfirmed estimates from TibetInfoNet puts Tibetan casualties around 100-150, far lower than what could be expected from such a disastrous quake. According to other reports obtained by Kham aid, 2871 Tibetans have lost their lives in Ngaba Prefecture and 9 in Kardze (Ch: Ganzi) Prefecture, and at least two people have lost their lives in earthquake-caused rockslides in the Gudrak township of Dartsedo, as of May 18th, 2008.

Also, following the quake, the power supply facilities in the Ngaba Tibetan-Qiang Autonomous Prefecture have suffered huge setbacks. The region had no power supply even on the third day after the quake, reported Chinese official source Xinhua. Although no other specific details could be obtained from the Tibetan quake hit areas, there is fear of serious landslides in the nearby Tibetan and Qiang villages in the Ngaba Prefecture.

Although the earthquake hit several areas of China, including many parts of Tibet, the damage caused by the quake within the Tibetan areas has been much less. A green house contractor for Kham aid from Kakhog (Ch: Hongyuan) reported that counties such as Kakhog and Barkham (Ch: Maerkang) in the Ngaba Prefecture have not witnessed any serious damage from the quake probably because the livelihoods and lifestyles of Tibetans differ completely from those of the Chinese in the region. As the scattered populations of Tibetans living around the quake site live in nomadic tents or traditional houses built of wood and stones, they may have been least affected, according to some Tibetans who have recently escaped Tibet. As per Radio Free Asia, the earthquake hit at a time when most of the Tibetan adults were away from their homes harvesting Yartsa Gunbu (*Cordyceps sinensis*) and therefore were at a lower risk of being hit by it severely.

The earthquake also resulted in some serious environmental threats. "The National Development and Reform Commission of China released a report saying that 391 reservoirs in five provinces have been damaged" (NewYorkTimes, May 15). There are serious threats of flooding as a result of the damages on these reservoirs. Additionally, the "quake lakes" formed as a result of rivers being blocked by landslide, as an aftermath of the disastrous quake, became a primary concern for several experts, environmentalists, and the local people. BBC reported that more than 30 quake lakes have been formed as a result of the earthquake, which is also prone to flooding. According to World Wildlife Fund (WWF China), "20 panda reserves in the nearby areas have been directly affected in the earthquake."

News about the damages caused by the quake in Tibet is scant, but that doesn't however, refute any incidence of damages.

Climate Breakdown at the Third Pole: Tibet by Dr. John Stanley

(Director, Ecological Buddhism, www.ecobuddhism.org)

The poison of global warming due to the harnessing of machines in all places and times, is causing the existing snow mountains to melt,

And the oceans will consequently bring the world within reach of the aeon's end.

Grant your blessings that it may be protected from these conditions!

- Sakya Trizin Rinpoche

The Tibetan plateau is the highest and largest in the world. It is guarded to the south by the Himalayas, to the north by the Kunlun, and to the west by the Hindu Kush and Pamir ranges. Its 46,000 glaciers, at an average height of 13,000 ft above sea level, constitute the Hindu Kush-Himalaya (HKH) Ice Sheet, the Earth's largest ice mass outside the poles. It has been termed 'the third Pole'.

Climate warming is causing melting of the HKH ice sheet at a rate of 7% a year. Aerial surveys over the last 30 years show snow lines rising, wetlands shrinking, and desertification increasing. In 2006, one third of climate observation stations in Tibet reported all-time high temperatures. The average temperature there is rising over seven times as fast as in China proper. Many scientists have concluded that current warming trends and political inertia will lead to complete loss of the HKH glaciers by about 2030 [3]. For example, in western Tibet lies the Buddhist and Hindu sacred mountain, Kailash. The head of the Sakyapa Buddhist tradition, Sakya Trizin Rinpoche, reports that ordinary pilgrims have written to him after observing with alarm the retreat of Mt. Kailash's glaciers and snowline. To them, this indicated the disturbance of the protective deities of the mountain.

The winter accumulation of snow on high mountains is compressed to form ice caps and glaciers. In summer, glaciers melt slowly, constantly feeding the rivers below. They are 'reservoirs in the sky' [4], present since long before humans practiced agriculture. The shrinkage, melting and retreat of high mountain glaciers is a worldwide result of global warming (Figure 2a,b). The ice is replaced by mountain lakes formed behind broken rock moraines. Downstream, flooding increases. This is followed by an irreversible decline in river flow, with severe loss of drinking and irrigation water. One sixth of the Earth's population depends for its water supply on glaciers and seasonal snowpacks. From India or China to California, food production is critically dependent on their melt water. Asia's great rivers—the Indus, Ganges, Brahmaputra, Salween, Mekong, Yangtze and Yellow—derive their summer flow from Tibetan glaciers. The basins of these rivers are home to 1.5 billion people from Pakistan to Indochina.

The 30-kilometer long Gangotri is one of the largest glaciers in the Himalayas and feeds into the Ganges river basin. It is shrinking twice as fast as it was 20 years ago. The Ganges is sacred to 800 million Hindus. Loss of its glacial meltwater would remove two thirds of its summer flow, causing water shortage for 500 million people and 37% of India's irrigated farmland. In Pakistan, 60% of the population depends on grain irrigated by the Indus.

In China, 23% of the population lives in the western regions where glacial meltwater provides the principal dry-season water source. Recent scientific studies have established that global warming is causing widespread ecological decline at the headwaters of the Yellow River, threatening water supplies to 120 million people. Senior Chinese climatologist Liu Shiying states that melting glaciers and permafrost are breaking up and drying out the land, turning grasslands into deserts and leaving lakes and rivers without water. A domino effect harms the flora, fauna, landscape and people of the source region, and ultimately the river itself. Water shortage and reduced run-off at the source will have far-reaching impacts on the economy, society and people, not only of the source region but in the middle and low reaches of the Yellow River.

Ironically, the two countries building most of the new coal-fired power plants, China and India, are precisely the ones whose food security is most massively threatened by the carbon emitted from burning coal. It is now in their interest to try and save their mountain glaciers by shifting energy investment from coal-fired power plants into energy efficiency and into wind farms, solar thermal power plants, and geothermal power plants. China, for example, can double its current electrical generating capacity from wind alone. - Lester Brown, 2008

The essential challenge is to design national energy policies to save the glaciers upon which Tibet, China, the Indian subcontinent and Indochina all depend. Right now China and India are pursuing a 'suicidal' economic policy of growth based on carbon fuels. In truth they need to cut carbon emissions by 80% as soon as possible. Asian civilization will not survive inaction or half-measures like partial decarbonization by mid-century. To date, proposals made by politicians for the convenience of the fossil fuel industry have no authentic bearing on the survival of billions of people, or civilization as we know it.



EDD Publications

(March 2008) ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT IN TIBET – A Crucial Issue

A revised second edition of "Environment and Development in Tibet—A Crucial Issue" was released by the EDD in March 2008. The first edition came out in 2003, following which there has been a number of new developmental policies in Tibet that have been threatening the fragile ecology of the Tibetan Plateau while marginalizing its people in their own land.

(December 2007) TIBET – A HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND ENVIRONMENT REPORT

A report on environment and development issues of Tibet titled "Tibet—A Human Development and Environment Report" was released on 10 December 2007, in New Delhi. This is the third comprehensive report on a number of environment and development issues in Tibet ranging from grassland degradation, damming water and mining to urbanization and forced relocation. The report provides a detailed picture of China's destructive environment and developmental policies in Tibet and proposes some alternative approaches that are best suited to the Tibetan plateau.

GUIDELINES FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN TIBET

(In English and Tibetan)

A handbook titled "Guidelines for International Development Projects and Sustainable Development in Tibet" is available in Tibetan/English. These guidelines articulate the need of the Tibetan people for a future in which they can maintain their culture and spiritual traditions without destroying the natural ecosystem surrounding them. It provides a clear guidance to all investors, donors and corporations to ensure that their projects genuinely benefit the Tibetan people and do not hamper the fragile ecology of Tibet.

(Note: These are our most recent publications. All the publications from our desk can be readily downloaded online at <http://tibet.net/en/diir/pubs/edi/>

For a free copy of any of the publications, please contact us at the address mentioned on the last page.

EDD Events in 2008

1. February 11, 2008: Ms. Chokyi and Ms. Dolma Yangzom attended a conference on Himalayan rivers and climate change in New Delhi, which was organized by the Navdanya Trust.

2. February 20, 2008: Sam Wangyal, an amateur film maker and photographer from London, shared with us his experiences and observations during one of his several visits to Tibet.

3. March 24-28, 2008: Eco Storm, Dharamshala - Ms. Dolma Yangzom attended Eco Storm, Dharamshala, a workshop organized by Base Camp Explorer in Kenya at Tibetan Children's Village, Dharamshala.

4. May 30- June 1, 2008: Ms. Chokyi and Dolma Yangzom attended a three day Global Convention on climate change organized by the World Environment Foundation at Palampur, India.

5. June 5 2008, World Environment Day: Our Environment and Development Desk organized an intensive environmental awareness workshop for high school students from around Dharamshala. An analysis of the survey we conducted at the end of the workshop can be summarized as follows:

1. All participants agreed that the conservation of environment in general is very important.
2. 100% of the participants showed their willingness to participate in such workshops in the future, while 99% of the students found the workshop very useful, interesting and informative.
3. More than half of the participants felt that such workshops are highly important and hence the number of students who can participate in such workshops should be increased.

6. 23-27 June 2008: Ms Dolma Yangzom attended Multi-track Diplomacy, Negotiation and Conflict Resolution Training organized by the Institute of Multi-track Diplomacy, based in Arlington, USA.

An Upcoming Project:

A documentary on the impact of climate change in Tibet is an on-going project. We are looking for photos and footage relevant to the project and will also appreciate any kind of help for the project.

How to Help Tibet through Eco-friendly Actions

- Write letters to your government to inform about environmental degradation in Tibet, expressing your concerns over Tibet's environment under China's colonial rule and its detrimental effects on your country.
- Write letters to the nearest Chinese Embassy to ask them to focus on environmental protection in Tibet.
- Establish a Tibet support group in your community.
- Organize workshops, conferences, video & slide shows and seminars on Tibetan environment and its global impact.
- Participate in community meetings on environment and raise the issues of Tibet in such forums.
- Contribute pictures and footage on Tibetan environment to our Environment and Development Desk.
- Impress upon your government to provide scholarship for environmental research on Tibet and other environmental projects.
- Tell your friends about environmental issues in Tibet. Email them our website address www.tibet.net/en and bookmark our home page.
- Donations are highly appreciated and will be used to promote awareness on environmental issues in Tibet.

We appreciate any information and photos on environment and development issues related to Tibet

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To,

If undelivered, Please return to:

Environment and Development Desk, DIIR
Central Tibetan Administration Dharamsala
(H.P.) India, 176215
Website: <http://www.tibet.net/en>
Email: edd@gov.tibet.net
edd.diir@gmail.com
Tel(off.): +91-1892-222510, 222457
Fax: +91-1892-224957

